THE READJUSTERS:

The Black-White Alliance that Once Governed Virginia

By

Edward Spannaus

The following two articles by Edward Spannaus and Wynne Saffer discuss a little-known feature of Virginia politics in the late 19th century: the rise and fall of the "Readjuster" movement. The period between the end of Reconstruction and the full-blown emergence of "Jim Crow" in the 1880s and 1890s is often glossed over in discussions of Virginia history, but it provides a fascinating and unique window into the roller-coaster quality of race relations in post-Civil War Virginia.

Introduction

Hard as it might be to believe today, an alliance between poor and working-class Whites, and recently emancipated Blacks, governed Virginia and several of its major cities from 1879 to 1883. Every former Confederate state had some sort of Black-White coalition grouping, but Virginia's – known as the "Readjusters" or the Readjuster Party -- has been called "the most successful interracial political alliance in the post-emancipation South."[1]

It resulted in very real – albeit temporary – political and economic gains for many of Virginia's Black citizens during the movement's ascendancy. And it posed, in the minds of its participants, an alternative model for the post-Reconstruction development of the former Confederacy.[2]

The Readjusters – so-called because they wanted to "readjust" the state's pre-war debt so that sufficient funds were available for public schools and other government services – had a profound impact on Virginia, not only during the time they held

power, but also over the long term, particularly with respect to education.

This alliance did not just create institutions *for* Blacks; it gave control of a number of these institutions to Blacks – which was unique among the Southern states.[3]

The most dramatic case of the benefits of Readjuster power was Petersburg, Virginia's largest Black-majority city. The Readjuster majority in the state legislature obtained a Black college and mental-health asylum for Petersburg. The Readjuster-controlled city government improved the streets and the water system, brought in streetlights and a streetcar system, appointed a Black public health officer, and subsidized prescription drugs, among other things.[4]

The success of the Readjuster coalition in uniting Whites and Blacks for a progressive economic program triggered a fierce reaction from Virginia's traditionalist, "Bourbon" ruling class, who took a number of steps to prevent this from ever happening again – including disfranchising not only Black voters but as many as one-half of the state's White voters as well.

Another way of trying to ensure that this was never repeated, was to erase it from history. In her book *Before Jim Crow*, Jane Dailey points out that the Readjusters don't fit into the standard narratives of southern political history, which often jump seamlessly from Reconstruction to the era of Jim Crow, and treat the violent re-imposition of segregation and the suppression of the Black vote as inevitable. As Dailey notes, when the Readjusters aren't being ignored altogether, they are dismissed as an historical aberration of little or no consequences for the South or the nation. She singles out as one glaring example of this, Charles Preston Poland's *From Frontier to Suburbia*, which, she notes, "purports to be an inclusive history of Loudoun County from 1725 to 1972," but "omits the years from 1877 to 1887 outright."[5]

The article that follows this, by Wynne Saffer, examines the Readjuster movement in Loudoun County from 1877 to 1885. In this introductory article, we will attempt to situate the Readjuster phenomenon in Loudoun, within the context of the post-Civil War turmoil throughout Virginia.

Old Virginia: Rule by the "Better Classes"

To understand the reaction of post-war Virginia to Reconstruction and the Readjuster movement which followed, it is essential to know something about this state's pre-war, or *ante-bellum*, history.

As one scholar has written of the disproportionate significance which Virginia attaches to its past glories and experiences:

> [T]he belief that Virginia has derived its cultural and social structure from a transplanted English gentry, replete with the customs of the late seventeenth-century manor, has given the state an unmistakable aristocratic and undemocratic flavor. Class consciousness, or a conscious ranking of people into socially superior or inferior positions by virtue of birth, wealth, and education, resulted in the establishment of a rigid social and cultural system. "There were classes" in old Virginia, writes Thomas Nelson Page, "and there was, perhaps, a stronger class feeling than existed anywhere else on this side of the water, unless it was in South Carolina." The idea of class, and the values attached to class have led the prevailing leadership groups of the Commonwealth to fear political innovation and to resist social change.[6]

The political system of ante-bellum Virginia was a far cry from the local democracy in which Thomas Jefferson professed to believe. Politics was controlled by a small elite: the "courthouse clique" (prominent planters, lawyers, and judges) on the local level, and a distillation of those with the best social and family connections on the state level. Even after universal, White manhood suffrage was introduced in 1851, little changed, and the "cavalier ideal and rule by an elite class" remained in place. Most Virginians were thought to be content to defer to the leadership aristocracy. "Popular democracy" had no place in the Old Dominion, and any agitation for reform was quickly suppressed.[7]

War and Reconstruction

The Civil War left Virginia devastated – it having suffered more physical damage than any other state – and its pre-war leadership demoralized. Many viewed Reconstruction as equally catastrophic: being governed by what they saw as Yankee carpetbaggers, home-grown scalawags, and uneducated Blacks, all at the point of a federal bayonet.

Among the Congressionally imposed requirements for ending military occupation, was that the Southern states must ratify the Fourteenth Amendment and adopt a new state constitution. A constitutional convention was held in 1867-68, which was dominated by Republicans, including many northerners who had come to Virginia with the Union Army. However, a coalition of Whites opposing the Radical Republicans emerged, and gained control over close to one-third of the delegates to convention.

In December of 1868, these oppositionist Whites formed the "Conservative Party," which consisted of die-hard traditionalists, former Democrats and Whigs, and some moderate Republicans who were alarmed by the Radicals. What united them was opposition to the Radical Republicans, and what many of them called "Negro rule."

Meanwhile, the constitutional convention produced what became known as the "Underwood Constitution," which provided for Black suffrage while disfranchising Whites who had fought for the Confederacy. A compromise, characterized as "universal suffrage and universal amnesty," was proposed to Federal officials by a group of Virginia leaders, mostly from the western part of the state. They said they would not object to Negro suffrage, if the disfranchising clauses of the proposed constitution could be voted on separately in the upcoming referendum. The compromise was accepted by President Grant and Congress, and the referendum, along with elections for Governor and the state legislature, was set for July 1869.

In the July elections, the disfranchising clauses were defeated, and the rest of the Underwood Constitution was approved by a near-unanimous vote. As well, Conservatives succeeded in electing their preferred candidate for Governor, and an overwhelming majority of the General Assembly. 27 Blacks were elected, of whom only three were Conservatives.

The Underwood Constitution had several important features, foremost of which was the requirement to establish, for

the first time, a statewide system of free public schools, with a dedicated funding stream. It created a secret ballot, as opposed to the public voice voting which had been one of the key instruments of Democratic political control. It also contained reform of the system of taxation, and the creation of a township (or magisterial district) system intended to break up the power of the Democratic-controlled "courthouse clique," by transferring such functions as tax assessment and collection, control of elections, and policing, to the district level.

When the new General Assembly met in October 1869, it quickly ratified the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution – clearing the way for the end of Reconstruction in Virginia and re-admission to the Union, which took place in January 1870.

Post-Reconstruction Legislation

The first post-Reconstruction legislature took three particularly significant actions (1) the establishment of a free public school system; (2) consolidating and chartering rail lines; and (3) the Funding Act, which provided for Virginia to fully fund and eventually pay off two-thirds of the state's pre-war debt (the other one-third being assigned to West Virginia).

The Funding Act was wildly unpopular from the outset, and when news of its passage, and stories of how it was aided by lobbyists and bribes, spread, it triggered protests in the western counties. It quickly became apparent that the payments required to service the debt were so large as to make it impossible for the state to meet its other obligations -- such as supporting the new school system. Most of the House of Delegates lost their seats in the 1871 elections; the next legislature repealed the Funding act, but Gov. Walker vetoed the repeal. Walker's actions delighted the northern and foreign speculators who held three-fourths of the state's bonds. Not for nothing did British bondholders honor Walker for years as "the father of the Funding Act."[8]

When challenges to the Funding Act reached Virginia's Supreme Court, the majority opinion upheld the Act in terms of the state's "honor" – the watchword of the Bourbon planter class and others of the established Virginia aristocracy. To those who went on and on about Virginia's "honor," prominent Wythe County attorney Frank S. Blair declared, in words soon to become famous: "Honor won't buy a breakfast."[9]

In a minority dissent, Supreme Court Justice Waller Staples held that the Funding Act was unconstitutional because it diverted funds that had been specifically designated in the constitution for education. Staples was from southwest Virginia (as was Frank Blair), and their statements were in accord with popular sentiment in that region of the state. People there, as in other parts of the state, wondered why an individual could go into bankruptcy, but a state couldn't--especially when that state had been ruined by a war waged by those to whom much of the debt was now owed.[10]

The Emergence of the Readjusters

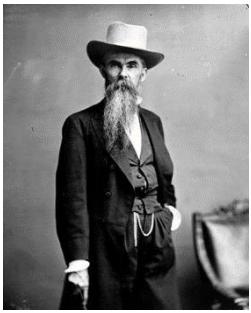
Over the decade of the 1870s, the debt issue simmered, until it came to a boil in the latter part of the decade over the state's inability to support the public schools and other public services. Upon taking office at the beginning of 1874, Gov. James L. Kemper found the state's financial condition much worse than he had expected, and he soon concluded that the Funding Act had been a "disastrous mistake." When he tried to ameliorate the crisis by reducing debt-service payments, the British bondholders objected, causing Kemper to threaten repudiation. He worked out a temporary compromise with the bondholders, but he was never able to achieve the rearrangement of the debt that he sought.

Kemper backed away from his inflammatory language, but the effect of his confrontation with the financiers was to fuel the already-growing anti-funder sentiment in the population, especially in the agrarian west.

Meanwhile, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, William Henry Ruffner, was increasingly alarmed by the short-changing of the public schools – a situation that was exacerbated by the Panic of 1873. When he publicly disclosed that the arrearage owed by the state to the public schools by 1876 was $550,000, this triggered an uproar. Antifunders, or "Readjusters" as they were becoming known, demanded to know why the state was diverting school money to pay overdue interest on bonds. No Readjuster himself, Ruffner nevertheless waged a very public fight over the "diversion" issue for two years, up through 1878, when many schools were closed for lack of funds.

In 1877, the Conservatives nominated Col. F. W. M. Holliday of Winchester for Governor. Holliday had appeared sympathetic to the Readjusters during the campaign and had convinced Gen. William Mahone--who himself was seeking the

Conservative gubernatorial nomination--to throw his support to Holliday.



General William Mahone

Mahone is one of the more interesting figures in Virginia history. Trained as an engineer at VMI, he first taught classics, and then went into the railroad business, where, among other things, he was active in surveying new routes. One of these was the "North and South Air-Line Railroad," proposed in 1854 and linking Norfolk to New York to the north, and New Orleans to the south and west; this later became part of the Pennsylvania Railway System.[11]

By 1860 he was president of the Norfolk & Petersburg Railroad. When the war broke out the next year, he was commissioned a Lt. Colonel, and had been promoted to Brigadier General by the end of 1861. He was then promoted to Major General three days after the Battle of the Crater during the siege of Petersburg and became known throughout Virginia as "the Hero of the Crater."

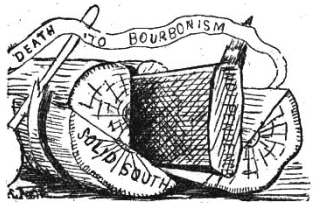
Mahone had also served as a Virginia State Senator, in absentia, during the war. As soon as the war was over, he plunged right back into the railroad business, and sought to consolidate the railroads in southside Virginia into one line. This of course took him back into the thick of politics, where railroads were a central issue.

Mahone was at first not a supporter of the Readjuster cause, and he had friends and allies among both Funders and Readjusters. In June of 1877, he abruptly shifted, writing an open letter in which he declared that he would rather "let the very wheels of government stand still," than tolerate "the perversion or conversion of the public-school fund to any other purpose than that for which it was created." As to the question of Virginia's "honor," Mahone was unsparing toward those who invoked "honor" while reneging on their promises to the people. "This twaddle about the honor of the State … is sheer nonsense" when it is compared to the robbery of the school fund, he declared.[12]

After the August Conservative Party convention, Mahone undertook a campaign to make the 1877 elections a forum on funding-vs.-readjustment and sought to get as many Readjusters as possible elected to the legislature, whether they were running as Conservatives or Independents.

There ensued a very unorthodox campaign by Virginia standards, notes historian Raymond Pulley, in which the Readjusters took the issues "directly before the electorate for discussion:"

> The Mahone forces flooded the state with rousing stump speakers who preached a gospel of debt reduction and free schools that was appealing to the small farmers, urban laborers, and Negroes—those classes of citizens newly enfranchised by the Underwood Constitution. [An] analysis of the voting returns of 1879 shows that the Readjuster party not only drew support from the predominately Negro Black-belt counties of the Southside but also from cities such as Norfolk and Petersburg and the democratic-minded counties of the trans-Blue Ridge and northern Piedmont.[13]



Death To Bourbonism

Despite his ambiguous stance during the campaign, when Holliday took office as Governor in 1878, he came out as an unequivocal defender of Virginia's "honor." A bill to modify the debt settlement and provide more money to the schools, introduced by Conservative Readjuster James Barbour, was passed by the Conservative-dominated General Assembly, and then vetoed by Gov. Holliday, who declared, in terms that would have made a Tidewater Bourbon proud, that "our fathers did not need free schools to make them what they were," and that schools were "a luxury … to be paid for by the people who wish their benefits."[14]

Over the next two years, the Conservatives split into Funder and Readjuster factions. At the close of the 1878-79 legislative session, a group of Readjusters met at the offices of the Richmond *Whig* and formed an organizing committee; one of their objectives was to elect pro-readjustment candidates to the U.S. Congress that Fall. Meanwhile, school financing continuing to dwindle, so that almost one-half of the public schools were shut down during the 1878-79 school year.

1879: The Readjuster Party Gains Control of the General Assembly

On February 25-26, 1879, 175 delegates convened at Mozart Hall in Richmond to form the Readjuster Party. The bulk of those attending were Conservatives, but Republicans, Greenbackers, and independents also participated. Black delegates represented Halifax and New Kent counties.

Professor Dailey describes the Mozart Hall convention as "the most significant interracial political forum in Virginia since the constitutional convention" that had been held during Reconstruction. Delegate William T. Jefferson of New Kent told the convention that he and other Black men present were seeking an opportunity to ally with progressive Whites. As to the debt, he said that "we don't want to pay a cent of it. We think we paid our share of it, if it was ever justly chargeable upon us, by long years of servitude." Other Blacks argued that since they had no part in creating the debt, they "shouldn't be taxed to pay for it, nor the money taken from their free schools and their children left destitute of education."[15]

As the new Readjuster Party mobilized for the Fall 1879 elections, the Bourbon-traditionalists likewise rallied to try to discredit the new coalition, charging that Mahone and his followers were deliberately stirring up class conflict so as "to unite with the negro and ignorant White men to control the state."[16]

The election became a referendum on debt payments versus the schools. Readjusters won both houses of the General Assembly, taking 56 of 100 seats in the House of Delegates, and 24 of 40 in the Senate. But, contrary to many historical accounts, this result was not immediately clear: it took a while after the election to establish. During the campaign, Readjusters had been wary of being too closely identified with the Black vote so as not to scare off their White supporters. And Black voters were suspicious of the Readjusters, led as they were by a former Confederate General.

With the Conservatives split between Funders and Readjusters, the Republicans—in particular, Black Republicans--had won enough seats to hold the balance of power in both houses. Thirteen of the Republicans were Blacks; their votes combined with the Readjusters could provide a majority. Negotiations began immediately on terms of unification. Mahone personally assured the Black Republicans of Readjuster support on issues of concern to them, such as support for Black schools,

abolition of the whipping post, a voice in patronage, and severing the poll tax from voting. (The poll tax, which went to support education, was also used as a requirement for voting, to hold down the Black vote.) It was as a result of these negotiations – and not the elections *per se* – that the Readjusters and their Black allies gained control over the Virginia legislature at the end of 1879.[17]

Matters were more confused when it came to national elections, and the Readjusters only elected two Congressmen in 1880, both from western districts. The Readjuster leaders recognized that only with the help of the Republicans and Blacks -- who mostly, but not always, voted Republican -- could they defeat the Conservatives/Democrats. Beyond the school-funding issue, the Readjusters saw the need to broaden their focus to include the poll tax, elimination of the whipping post, and jobs—which meant getting control of federal patronage.

1881: Mahone in the U.S. Senate…

When Mahone was selected by the Virginia Senate to go to the U.S. Senate in 1881, he arrived at a propitious moment when the U.S. Senate was evenly divided between Republicans and Democrats. By working out a deal with President Chester Arthur and the GOP, Mahone joined the Republican Caucus, and won control of *all* federal patronage jobs in Virginia – over 2000 positions. (Mahone's joining the Republicans caused him to be denounced by the Funder faction as "a traitor to his state, his section, and his party."[18])

Now, for the first time, federal jobs were distributed evenly among the Congressional districts. These jobs were given to Readjuster supporters, but in a way which included far more Blacks and women than ever before. Mahone spent a great deal of his time in the U.S. Senate reviewing job applications and confirming an applicant's political *bona fides*.[19]

Mahone's joining the Republicans in the U.S. Senate was decisive in convincing an all-Black GOP convention, which met in March 1881 in Petersburg, to form an alliance with the Readjusters – which many delegates initially opposed, feeling that they would lose their identity as Republicans. The statement of principles adopted by the Petersburg convention emphasized Republican goals, such as free schools, the jury, and the ballot. And in endorsing affiliation with the Readjusters, the convention declared that the rights of "the colored people of Virginia" would

be "better secured and preserved by aiding that party [i.e. the Readjusters] in its efforts to permanently settle the antagonism of races, which has unfortunately affected the prosperity of our state." In turn, when the Readjuster Party convention met a few months later, it endorsed the agenda of the Petersburg Republican Convention.[20]

… And a Readjuster Governor

Mahone's control of federal patronage enabled him to reward supporters and build up his own political machine – which was a major factor in the Readjuster sweep in the 1881 state elections, in which a Readjuster Governor was elected while the Readjusters kept their control of the General Assembly. Moreover, the other U.S. Senate seat was also filled by a Readjuster, H. H. Riddleberger from the Valley. Mahone's interracial alliance now controlled all the levers of government in Virginia.

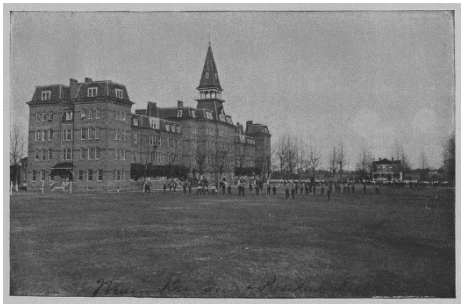
This Readjuster-Black coalition was an alliance based on self-interest, not idealism. The White Readjusters could not govern without the Black Republicans, and the Blacks could not govern without the Readjusters. Working together, they made revolutionary changes in Virginia's government. Blacks were operating from a position of political strength; they were not simply being manipulated by the pragmatic and wily Mahone, as is often suggested.[21]

The new Governor, William Cameron, had been Mayor of Petersburg and attended the March GOP convention in that city as a Readjuster representative. Cameron's first message to the General Assembly asked for a new debt so that moneys could no longer be diverted from the public schools to pay for debt service. He also asked for a college for Black teachers, and the elimination of the poll tax to remove that impediment to African American suffrage.[22]

One of the first actions of the 1881-82 General Assembly was to again pass the Riddleberger debt bill, which in the previous session had been vetoed by Gov. Holliday. This reduced the debt to $21 million and resulted in substantially lower debt service payments by the state government.[23]

With a Readjuster in the Governor's mansion, the General Assembly was now able to fulfill many of its campaign promises. First was a major infusion of funds into the public schools, allowing both Black and White schools to reopen. The poll tax was repealed, and the whipping post was abolished. State asylums

and institutions of higher learning received increased funding. Real estate taxes were lowered, and more of the tax burden was assumed by corporations, especially railroads. Even dueling was outlawed.



Hampton Institute

White farmers benefitted from a number of these provisions, as well as from the General Assembly's funding of Virginia Agricultural & Mechanical College at Blacksburg (now Virginia Tech). Although subject to heavy pressure to use Virginia's Morrill Act endowment for Washington College (now Washington & Lee), the Virginia Military Institute, and the University of Virginia, the General Assembly directed that all Morrill Act funding go to Blacksburg and to the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute for Blacks (as of 1890, land-grant funds were directed to Virginia Normal).

As historian Alan Moger wrote about the Readjuster's legislative reform package: "By this program Virginia profited from progressive measures years before a liberal movement was effective in any other southern state. The program concerned the interests of the people, both White and Black, rather than the profits of the wealthy and a privileged few." [24]

Black Political Power: The Case of Petersburg

Under Readjuster rule, Blacks attained an unprecedented degree of political power in Virginia. Sixteen African American legislators served in the General Assembly in the 1881-82 session. They were able to push through legislation which benefitted their communities: for example, the Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute for Negroes in Petersburg -- the South's first state-supported college for training Black teachers -- which offered a four-year classical curriculum; and a new asylum for the Black mentally-ill, also in Petersburg. Both institutions were operated under Black leadership; in fact, the 1882 law creating the Normal Institute specified that six of the seven members of the Board of Visitors "shall be well-qualified colored men." Virginia Normal's

first principal noted its significance: “No State in this country has taken a position as radical as this, placing State funds and a State institution in the hands of colored men.”[25]

Blacks became increasingly prominent in municipal governments across the state, but most notably in two cities, Danville and Petersburg, which were both under Readjuster-Republican control.

As in other cities, Petersburg’s Readjuster-controlled City Council pursued a multi-faceted reform agenda. This included lowering real and personal property taxes, raising business taxes, and establishing an income tax and a capital-gains tax; banning the chain gang and the whipping post (before it was abolished statewide); and moving women and children out of the city jail and into a new facility. Public health measures included appointing a city physician to provide medical aid to the poor, providing home health care to the elderly, and subsiding prescription drug costs.

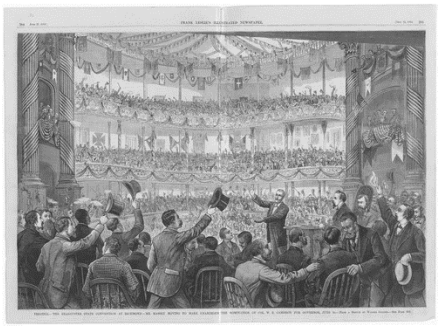
Urban infrastructure improvements included modernizing the city water system and building a new reservoir, paving streets and sidewalks, building new city parks, and bringing in street lighting and a horse-drawn streetcar system. And all this, and more, was done without increasing the city’s debt.[26]

One of the most remarkable battles fought by Petersburg’s Black leadership was over teachers in the public schools. Although Petersburg had one of the strongest school systems in the state, its Black schools had only White teachers. The Black community believed, with good reason, that many of these teachers were notoriously underqualified, and had been rejected to teach in White schools. After a pitched battle, Governor Cameron ordered the dismissal of the school board, and its replacement by one that would employ qualified Black teachers. Other cities and towns then followed suit, including Richmond, Lynchburg, Norfolk, Hampton, Danville, Charlottesville, and many smaller towns. Between 1879 and 1883 the number of Black teachers and principals in the state tripled, as did the number of Black schools. It was shown that schools with Black teachers showed improvements in student attendance, scholarship, and behavior.[27] And although the White Readjusters opposed school integration, the General Assembly did mandate equal pay for White and Black teachers – a measure which was repealed after the Readjusters lost power.[28]

Defeat of the Readjusters

Most frightening to Virginia's Bourbons and traditionalists was Mahone's success in uniting Virginia's poor Whites, urban immigrants, and farmers, with Blacks. Some sneered that the Readjuster Party was "a drove of hogs," consisting of "ignorant negroes and rascally Whites," led by a "hog drover."[29]

"The triumph of Mahone's Readjuster party in 1879 threw a deep and lasting fright into the Old Virginia mind," wrote historian Pulley. For years after Mahone had passed from the scene, the specter of the movement he created was a source of apprehension for Virginia traditionalists. As Pulley puts it, his opponents charged that Mahone's unorthodox political campaigning had stirred up class war between "responsible men of property and experience," and "illiterate poor Whites and Negroes."[30]



1883 Convention

To attempt to regain support from those to whom Mahone was appealing, the Conservative Party undertook a dramatic shift in the summer of 1883. For the first time, rather than holding its convention in Richmond, it moved to the west, to Lynchburg. They made special efforts to provide representation to the Shenandoah Valley and southwest Virginia, both hotbeds of Readjuster sentiment. To steal Mahone's thunder, they accepted the Riddleberger debt settlement, and wholeheartedly backed free public schools for both Blacks and Whites. And, they changed the name of the party, from "Conservative" to "Democratic."[31]

But that wasn't all. They also determined to play the race card, to scare lower-class Whites with the phantom of "Negro rule." A traditionalist paper, the Richmond *State*, asserted that the only issue to be settled in the upcoming election was whether Virginia would be "ruled by her own true sons or by the African horde which has been gathered into a mass and solidified by a few unnatural Virginians, who are enemies to their state and renegades to their race."[32]

Conveniently, a few days before the election, a race riot broke out in Danville, a Black- and Readjuster-controlled city, in which four Blacks and one White were killed. Whether the clash was spontaneous or provoked is still debated by historians. But, either way, the Democrats sent riders to all corners of the state with lurid accounts of the mayhem, portraying it as the "fruits of Mahoneism" and of "Negro rule." Most observers agree that the Democrats were able to use the Danville events to swing the election in their favor. The Democrats won about two-thirds of the seats in both houses of the General Assembly, and Readjuster control of Virginia was broken.

The Old Order Restored

Mahonism

For the next two decades, the Democratic Party, acting on behalf of the traditionalist oligarchy and some more-modern business interests, devoted itself to restoring the old order, and taking measures to ensure that "Mahoneism" could never emerge again.

In 1884 and 1894, legislation was enacted which, as Pulley says, "gave legislative sanction to electoral fraud by facilitating the stuffing of ballot boxes, the manipulation of the illiterate vote, and the falsification of election returns."[33] These measures not only reduced and controlled the Black vote, but left the Republican Party powerless as a state-wide force.

Nonetheless, the Democrats had to tread lightly on restricting the franchise, for fear of arousing the "spirit of Mahone." It wasn't until the turn of the century, that the Democrats felt sufficiently confident to seek repeal of the Reconstruction-era Underwood Constitution. This coincided with the 1890s rise of the myth of the "Lost Cause," and the spread of the literary movement glorifying the "Old Virginia" mystique, characterized by portrayals of the splendors of colonial Virginia, "willowy ladies, cultivated gentlemen, loyal slaves and splendid mansions."[34]

By 1900, the movement to repeal the Underwood Constitution was well under way. In order to prevent any new Mahone-type movement from arising, the intention from the beginning was to disfranchise both Blacks and poor Whites. When the question as to whether to hold a new constitutional convention was put to a vote, the strongest opposition came from the western, transmontane counties, and the Northern Neck – a once-prosperous area, but by then populated by poor White and Black small farmers. In order to even get enough support to put the question to a referendum, pledges were made at the 1900 Democratic Convention that no Whites would be disfranchised. The 1901-02 constitutional convention dragged on for thirteen months, taking so long because of sectional disagreements over suffrage, and due to well-founded fears that the new constitution would disfranchise poor and illiterate Whites in the mountain regions and elsewhere, along with Black voters.

The suffrage article as finally adopted was the work of Carter Glass. It included the poll tax, the literacy test, and the "understanding" clause—under which a prospective voter must be able to read and explain any section of the new constitution. During debate, Glass acknowledged that the fear of Negro domination was not the only issue: he explained that the purpose was designed to "eliminate the darkey as a political factor in this State," as well as making it impossible for "unworthy men of our own race . . . to cheat their way into prominence."[35]

The other major issue was whether the new constitution would be submitted to the electorate for ratification, or simply proclaimed by the convention to be in effect. Glass reversed his previous position and declared that he would not submit the new constitution, "the work of a body of Virginia gentlemen," to voters "pronounced already to be unworthy and incapable in exercising the right of suffrage."

In the end, the new constitution was put into effect by proclamation. Its impact was shown in the cutting in half the number of voters participating in the 1904 presidential election as compared to the 1900 election: 264,000 in 1900, reduced to 130,000 in 1904. Black voting declined by an estimated 90% after the 1902 constitution went into effect. But in absolute numbers, more Whites were disfranchised than Blacks; some historians say that half of the White voters were disfranchised.

The Democratic Party had succeeded in restoring the old Virginia system of rule by the elites, which would remain intact for over half a century into the future.

Endnotes

[1] Jane Dailey, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia (*Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), Pg. 1.
[2] Leigh Alexandra Soares, "A Bold Promise: Black Readjusters and the Founding of Virginia State University" (2012) *Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects.* Paper 1539626691. https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-r9nh-jg79, Accessed Sept. 14, 2019.
[3] *Ibid*.
[4] William D. Henderson, *Gilded Age City* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1980), iii-iv, Pg. 481.
[5] Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*, 9. Professor Daily does not exaggerate. Charles P. Poland's *From Frontier to Suburbia* (Marceline, Mo.: Walsworth Publishing Co., 1976), remains, I believe, the definitive history of Loudoun County. He covers post-war Loudoun history up to 1877, where he mentions, in passing, the Readjuster ticket of McCabe and Carter as splitting the Loudoun Conservatives and bringing about their demise, and never mentions them again, finally picking up electoral politics in 1894 while discussing the Virginia Populists. Wynne Saffer's article published herein thus fills a gigantic gap in published Loudoun County history.
[6] Raymond H. Pulley, *Old Virginia Restored* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1968), 2. Pulley is citing Philip Alexander Bruce and Thomas Nelson Page, two prominent Virginia "Lost Cause" authors.

[7] *Ibid*. 3-5; Jack P. Maddex, Jr. *The Virginia Conservatives: 1867-1879 (*Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), PP. 11-12.

[8] Maddex, *The Virginia Conservatives, Pg.* 96.
[9] Virginius Dabney, *Virginia: The New Dominion* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1971), Pg. 377.
[10] I*bid*.
[11] Nelson M. Blake, *William Mahone of Virginia* (Richmond, Garrett & Massie, 1933), PP. 16-37.
[12] Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*, Pg. 41
[13] Pulley, *Old Virginia Restored,* Pg. 37.
[14] Dabney, *Virginia: The New Dominion,* Pg. 381, Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*, Pg. 43.
[15] Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*, PP. 43-44.
[16] Pulley, *Old Virginia Restored,* Pg. 36.
[17] Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*, PP.46-47.
[18] Dabney, *Virginia: The New Dominion,* Pg. 386
[19] Dailey gives the example of Miss Annie Matthews, a Treasury Department employee from Waterford in Loudoun County, who received a clean bill of health from the Loudoun County Readjuster chairman, G.W. Hoge, in March 1882. Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*, Pg. 60.

[20] Brent Tarter*, A Saga of the New South: Race, Law, and Public Debt in Virginia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016), PP. 63-64.
[21] Soares notes: "Despite the [Readjuster] party's sizable base of Black voters, scholars have long approached the period with a top-down focus on White leaders' motivation and rhetoric, largely ignoring or misinterpreting the Black community's own reform agenda." Soares, "A Bold Promise," Pg. 3.
[22] Tarter, *A Saga of the New South*, PP. 69-70.
[23] In 1889, after the Readjusters had been completely ousted from power, efforts began to roll back elements of the Riddleberger debt settlement; these provisions were enacted in 1892.
[24] Moger, *Virginia: Bourbonism to Byrd*, Pg. 47.
[25] Soares, "A Bold Promise," Pg. 21.
[26] Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*, PP. 68-70; Henderson, *Gilded Age City,* PP. 122-130, 481.
[27] Soares, "A Bold Promise," Pg. 27.
[28] Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*, PP. 70-76.
[29] Pulley, *Old Virginia Restored,* Pg. 38.
[30] *Ibid.*
[31] Dabney, *Virginia: The New Dominion,* PP. 391-92.
[32] Quoted in Pulley, *Old Virginia Restored,* Pg. 44.
[33] Pulley, *Old Virginia Restored,* Pg. 56.
[34] *Ibid*. PP. 58-59.
[35] *Ibid*. Pg. 84.